

## CONTINUED...

## Crossed

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"I think this whole movement wouldn't be where it is without her," Father Berrigan said.

That's a view shared by Suzanne Schnittman, life issues coordinator for the Diocese of Rochester.

"Of all the consistent-life-ethic advocates I've encountered since we began to understand this philosophy nearly 20 years ago, Carol Crossed remains the outstanding example of private and public consistency, of the person with the most fire in her belly to defend all life," Schnittman said.

"For more than 20 years, Carol has unwaveringly put her life and reputation on the line, being arrested nearly 20 times, serving ... jail sentences, consuming and purchasing only the products that hurt no one, offering her home to whoever needs it, speaking out when the rest of us have gone home."

## Honestly, though

Crossed's vitae reads like a history of the consistent-life-ethic movement. To wit:

She is a founding member of the Seamless Garment Network Inc., a national coalition of more than 130 consistent-life-ethic groups, and founder of Common Ground of Upstate New York, an organization of consistent life activists. On Feb. 1, Common Ground gave her the Susan B. Anthony Award, honoring her lifetime of commitment to the consistent life ethic.

She's a legislative coordinator for Bread for the World, an anti-hunger legislative lobbying group.

She's a former advocate and organizer for Project Roothold, which promoted relations among indigenous peoples in North and Latin America. Crossed is one-fourth Cherokee.

She was a 1985 delegate to the World Health Conference on Women and Children in Mexico.

Not to mention that she will receive a Gaudette Medal from St. Bonaventure Uni-



Submitted photo

Carol Crossed marches with pro-life union members at the Rochester Labor Day Parade in 1990.

versity in Olean on March 23. The medal recognizes business and community leaders who exemplify the spirit of St. Francis of Assisi through their joy, hope and service. Schnittman said she also has nominated Crossed for a "Teacher of Peace Award" to be given later this year by Pax Christi U.S.A., the Catholic peace group.

And these are just a few highlights from Crossed's biography.

Yet Crossed quickly points out that she has been able to do these things only because of her unique circumstances. Although she worked as a schoolteacher during the 1960s, her husband, Richard, a developer who specializes in low-income housing, has been the family's primary source of financial support, she said.

"I don't expect other people to have done all the things that I have done," she said. "I've just done it out of my heart. It's a calling, and I never wonder why other people aren't doing them. I'm a well-off person. I've been blessed with financial resources. It's something that I have to re-

turn." She added that her six grown children also have let their mother pursue her activism in a relatively guilt-free manner. She admitted that her anti-hunger efforts sometimes had an impact on their growing years.

"I was so involved in world hunger that my children didn't always have enough to eat at night," she said with a laugh.

Though she lives in a comfortable home, she furnishes it with secondhand goods, wears used clothes and owns nothing in her name — in order to protect herself from lawsuits by those with firsthand experience of her acts of civil disobedience — including abortion providers whose offices she has blocked. Her family tithes its income, and has even established its own foundation to fund consistent-life-ethic groups, she said.

Despite her strong convictions on all life issues, Crossed can be ambivalent about implications of the stands she takes. She has plenty of friends who are pro-choice and pro-death-penalty, for example, and regularly invites people of differing views to discuss issues with her.

She said she has wrestled with such questions as what would happen to women in a world where abortion is outlawed, or to the defenseless if the oppressed refuse to liberate themselves through armed struggle. This sense of gray in a world she tries to render in black and white also influences her political choices, she said.

"I will not work on anyone's campaign or donate to anyone's campaign who is not consistent-life-ethic, so, as you can imagine, I'm not too busy," she said with a laugh. "But when I vote, I do vote for the lesser of two evils."

That means, for example, that she struggles with whether to vote for a candidate who is pro-choice but opposes the death penalty and supports public funding of health care for poor people. Or whether to vote for a candidate who opposes abortion but favors other policies she sees as detrimental to human life. The dilemmas presented at the ballot box are enough to make her physically ill come election time, she said.

## Accolades

Crossed's unswerving commitment to the consistent life ethic has especially influenced her own diocese. During the October 1993 Diocesan Synod, Crossed and other consistent-life activists pressed to have the seamless garment concept included among the synod delegates' priorities. They stood outside the Rochester Riverside Convention Center where delegates were meeting and held a banner advocating their cause. Crossed stayed overnight outside the convention center for two days in a row.

In the end, the synod delegates voted promotion of the consistent life ethic as the diocese's No. 2 priority.

That kind of commitment to the consis-

tent life ethic has marked Crossed's career, a career that has touched the life of Mary Ellen Frisch, an activist in the pro-life movement during the late 1980s and early 1990s.

Frisch, who attends St. Christopher's Church in Chili, said she has prayed with Crossed outside abortion clinics and worked beside her at St. Peter's Kitchen, an outreach ministry of Sts. Peter and Paul Church in Rochester where Frisch was assistant director.

Frisch said Crossed influenced her to move beyond judging people by their stance on abortion to seeing "the person behind the opinion." Crossed made her realize that people with differing views on life issues could still work together in such places as St. Peter's to help others, she said, adding that she considers herself a consistent-life-ethic person now.

"As I feel right now, it's all interlocked," she said. "It all comes down to life whether it's the baby in the womb or the guy on death row or some old person who has outgrown their 'usefulness' and is taking up so much food, so much space, so much air. I really do believe that they're all just as important because it comes down to a basic respect for the sacredness of life."

Rachel MacNair, director of research for the Seamless Garment Network, pointed out that Crossed has helped to move the consistent-life-ethic movement into ecumenical territory, forging bonds across denominational divides, and even attracting atheists and agnostics to the movement. A Quaker from Kansas City, Mo., MacNair said Crossed has been among those activists who have made it easier for liberals to embrace the pro-life cause by linking it to other life issues. She noted that Crossed's promotion of the seamless-garment concept has enabled activists like herself to reach those on the left who are uneasy about abortion but who are equally uneasy about banning the right.

"It's gotten to the point where if I say 'seamless garment' first, I can get through that," MacNair said in a phone interview.

And that's the beauty of Crossed's work, according to Helen Alvare, director of planning and information for the National Conference of Catholic Bishops' Secretariat for Pro-Life Activities. In a phone interview, Alvare said Crossed's personal embodiment of life causes selectively supported by rightists and leftists makes transparent the fact that human life deserves protection in all its forms.

"Respect for human life is not a narrow, sectarian position," she said. "It can be reached if you start from the left or the right."

Crossed said Christians are called to consistent life ethic by Jesus Christ, who underwent crucifixion at the hands of his enemies rather than strike out at them.

"I really feel that nonviolence is the answer to violence," she said. "Whether it's war or abortion, the choice is to kill for our own security ... (But) I think the crucifixion is the ultimate expression of love. It means that I have to die for my neighbor."

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